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FORMER MARTIN AGENCY EXEC JOE ALEXANDER SUES DIET MADISON AVENUE AND ADWEEK

Suit seeks \$25 million; attorney says plaintiff plans to also take legal action against his former employer and parent Interpublic Group



By [Ann-Christine Diaz](#). Published on September 20, 2019.



Joe Alexander Credit: Courtesy Martin Agency

Nearly two years after he departed from The Martin Agency following allegations of sexual misconduct, former Chief Creative Officer Joe Alexander is suing anonymous social media account Diet Madison Avenue, along with industry publication Adweek and its former editor-at-large, Patrick Coffee.

Alexander and his attorney Steven Biss, who works out of his own firm based out of Charlottesville, Virginia, filed a complaint yesterday in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia. The

complaint alleges that the defendants participated in defamatory and conspiratorial actions that “tortiously” interfered with Alexander’s business activities—that is, they intentionally aimed to harm his employment.

The suit claims that “false and defamatory accusations of sexual harassment and other misconduct” published by DMA on its social accounts and what it calls DMA Doe Defendants 1-17 “destroyed” everything Alexander had worked for throughout his career. The suit lists his various career accomplishments, including his work on the long-running Geico “Gecko” ads, as well as accolades at adfests such as the Cannes Lions, One Show and Clios.

The complaint also claims that Adweek and Coffee acted “in concert with or on behalf of DMA and the DMA Doe Defendants, published a damning indictment of Joe, citing unnamed ‘sources,’ anonymous ‘women,’ an unidentified ‘former executive,’ and unidentified ‘former employees’ and ‘former co-workers,’” referring to a December 2017 article repeatedly referred to in the suit as the “Adweek Hit Piece.”

Alexander is seeking compensatory and punitive damages to the tune of \$25,350,000, along with additional fees, including those related to court costs and expenses. He’s seeking damages “for the extreme insult, pain, embarrassment, humiliation, mental suffering” and destruction of his career and reputation, as well as financial loss due to contract interference, “common law conspiracy,” defamation and intentional infliction of emotional distress, the suit says.

“My parents named me Joe Alexander. But that name no longer exists,” Alexander said in a statement. “It’s gone. My full identity was stolen. The thieves gave me a new name. Predator. They also like Creep. Misogynist. Or plain old Pig. Just look it up. They used every weapon imaginable to take my good name, reputation and career away. Deception. Lies. Intimidation. Coercion. Smears. The amazing thing? It all happened in broad daylight, in front of millions. There was nothing I could do. No chance to defend myself. They hit me hard and left me for dead. Or at least they thought they did. Today, I start the due process to get my name back. Joe Alexander. The name my father and mother gave me. It’s mine. I own it. No one can take it away.”

Ad Age reached out to DMA’s attorney A. Louis Dorny of Gordon Rees Scully Mansukhani, as well as Adweek and Coffee, who is now employed by Business Insider.

Dorny said that as of now he has no comment and said he has yet to see the complaint. Adweek and Coffee have not yet responded to multiple requests for comment.

Elaborating on the suit, Alexander’s attorney Biss said that “acting in concert with DMA and the DMA Does, Adweek and Coffee promoted the preconceived storyline and served as a megaphone to broadly publish the false narrative about Joe Alexander.”

The suit also mentions Interpublic Group of Cos., the holding company that owns The Martin Agency, which is part of the McCann Worldgroup network. It alleges that IPG ordered The Martin Agency to terminate Alexander following false statements made by DMA and DMA defendants in November 2017, “in the hopes that DMA would not look further into the cover-up of sexual harassment by the ‘C-suite’ and/or the handling of sexual harassment claims by IPG/Martin.”

When Ad Age asked Biss if there are any plans with regards to Alexander’s former employer, he said “IPG, The Martin Agency and others are not innocent bystanders,” and that Alexander “expects to take legal action within the next 30 days to fully address the harm caused by IPG, The Martin Agency and certain of their agents and employees.”

In response, IPG said in a statement, “We stand by our actions and processes in this case and would defend our position vigorously against a potential suit.”

Alexander left The Martin Agency in December 2017 following the shop's internal investigation into sexual harassment allegations, prompted by posts that had surfaced on the anonymous social media account Diet Madison Avenue.

Alexander's complaint summarizes what he alleges to be the defamatory portions of the Adweek story and links to the story. For the article, Adweek interviewed 10 women and one man, two of whom were named in the story—Sissy Estes, who worked at The Martin Agency from 2007 to 2012, and Senior Art Director Daniela Montañez, who worked there from 2007 to 2013. The story also said that the interviewees had reported concerns about Alexander's behavior to the agency, with incidents dating back to the 1990s.

The complaint refers to the Adweek story at length and challenges multiple statements in the story. The Adweek story had reported that one woman said Alexander's nickname in the 2000s was "HR Joe." The trade pub also reported that one woman who worked in the creative department at The Martin Agency was fired by Alexander after she repeatedly rejected his advances. One employee's complaint was settled in 2013 for an undisclosed sum, the Adweek story said. In the story, Adweek did report that Alexander denied the claims and said, "The allegations you are reporting on are false. All of them."

The suit states that "virtually every article" published by Coffee for Adweek between December 2017 and July 2019 "contains provably false and defamatory statements about Joe."

Adweek is owned by Canadian private-equity firm Beringer Capital.

At the time of his departure, Alexander told Ad Age in a statement that the decision to leave was his. "Rather than a drawn-out, hurtful investigation, resigning was the proper thing to do to protect my family and all the people I've worked so closely together with in my 26 wonderful years," he said.

Days later, The Martin Agency then followed with a note to staff saying "The decision was ours" when it came to Alexander's departure.

The suit filed yesterday, however, centers on the activities Alexander says led to his "termination" at the agency: "DMA and its agents and co-conspirators caused The Martin Agency to summarily terminate Joe's employment without any due process or opportunity to be heard."

When asked about the contradiction between what he previously told Ad Age and what's stated in the complaint, Biss said, "Joe resigned to avoid the ignominy and to spare the agency, but he was given no real choice. IPG had its mind made up. It was a sham. Rather than face a kangaroo inquisition, Mr. Alexander left with his dignity and self-respect."

"What happened to Joe Alexander was an egregious violation of fundamental principles of due process," Biss added.

See a copy of the full complaint below.

In this article:

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Ann-Christine Diaz

Ann-Christine Diaz is the Creativity Editor at Ad Age. She has been covering the creative world of advertising and marketing for more than a decade. Outside of the job, she can be found getting in touch with her own creativity.

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